

## From *Hikayat Hang Tuah* to *Bharat Ek-Khoj*: A Malay Culture Hero in an Indian Docudrama

\*KOGILAVANI NAGARAJAH

MD SALLEH YAAPAR

School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia,  
11800 USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

\*Corresponding author: kogilavaninagarajah@student.usm.my

**Published online:** 25 May 2023

**To cite this article:** Kogilavani Nagarajah and Md Salleh Yaapar. 2023. From *Hikayat Hang Tuah* to *Bharat Ek-Khoj*: A Malay culture hero in an Indian docudrama. *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* 30(1): 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2023.30.1.4>

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2023.30.1.4>

**Abstract.** Hang Tuah, the most illustrious warrior figure in Malay literature, is said to have lived in Malacca during the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah in the 15th century. The story of Hang Tuah has fascinated audiences for many centuries and continues to be retold and fashioned to attract modern audiences. This study traces the adaptation of Hang Tuah across different languages, cultures and media. It explores the adaptation of Hang Tuah by an Indian from India. The objective of this study is to analyse what transpires in the adaptation of a Malay literary text to an Indian docudrama and make a close analysis of Hang Tuah as a Malay culture hero based on *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. His qualities as a culture hero are discussed thoroughly according to the concept of a culture hero by Jerome Long. At the same time, this research allows the readers to go into the Indian mind, asking especially the director to explain why he decided to adapt Hang Tuah in his historical docudrama. This study article critically analyses the transformation of the Malay culture hero, Hang Tuah, in the literary text entitled *Hikayat Hang Tuah* to Hang Tuah in the docudrama entitled *Bharat Ek-Khoj*. The transformation is examined in the context of literature-to-film adaptation. The relation between the original source and the screen adaptations is also investigated.

**Keywords and phrases:** Hang Tuah, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Bharat Ek-Khoj*, literature-to-film adaptation, Shyam Benegal, Malay culture hero

## Introduction

Most cultural groups or societies all over the world do have and celebrate their culture hero. A culture hero is a symbol, a pride, an archetype or a role model for a society or a particular group of people. A culture hero transmutes the world through invention, discovery, agriculture, musical composition, tradition, law or religion and is conventionally the most paramount legendary figure of a people.

At times, a culture hero is considered to be a mythicised historical figure who embodies the aspiration or ideals of a society. There are many examples of culture heroes from all over the world. They include King Arthur, Robin Hood, Beowulf and Weyland for the English and Welsh; Nuwa, Yellow Emperor, Bodhi Dharma for the Chinese; Achilles, Hector, Odysseus for the Greeks; and Krishna, Rama, Lakshmana for the Indians. And the list of culture heroes goes on illimitable. As mentioned, the people will perpetuate to exalt their own culture heroes, some even go to the extent of worshipping their culture heroes, like the Chinese, Indians and Greeks. Like most people, the Malays who form a sizable population of Southeast Asia and are opulent with the history of their civilisation, have a great culture hero with all his own grandeur. The hero is none other than Hang Tuah.

Who is Hang Tuah? Is he the most loyal servant of his sultans? Is he a culture hero? Or is he a warrior with supernatural powers which is claimed to be inherited only by mythical heroes? Or is he a diplomat who could verbalise languages as claimed by most of the descriptions of inconsequential books like the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*<sup>1</sup> or *Sulalatus Salatin*<sup>2</sup> (*Malay Annals*)? Or is he just a myth amongst the Malay society which vaunted him for apperception or as a shield against foreign attacks? The more educated minds start to cogitate about people and history, the more questions were raised against the authenticity and facts of events and legends. While there always seem to be questions about his ethnicity and inception, there seems to be a general notion that he was an authentic warrior who exhibited virtues of bravery, wisdom and loyalty to his sultans. As Muhammad Haji Salleh states:

Hang Tuah is a culture hero who defines both himself and the Malays, along with their feudal and universal values. Three forms of existences have been bestowed on him by the peoples of the Malay Archipelago, i.e., the historical, the fictional and the oral. (Muhammad Haji Salleh 2012, 121)

There are many versions of Hang Tuah written by various people such as Richard Olaf Windstedt's *Malay Annals* (1938), Shellabear's *Sulalatus Salatin* (1986), A. Samad Ahmad's *Sulalatus Salatin* (1979) but the most consequential version is the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* which portrays him as a legendary warrior, who lived in

Malacca during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah (1424–1444), Muzaffar Shah (1446–1456), Sultan Mansur Shah (1456–1477), Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah (1477–1488) and Sultan Mahmud Shah (1488–1511) (Hashim and Rohaidah 2015, 82). *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is considered as magnum opus by Malay society and scholars. When the Greeks are proud of their *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, while the Indians are proud of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, and the Englishman with *Beowulf*, the Malays are proud of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* which venerates their culture hero, Hang Tuah. Malay culture holds the Hang Tuah legends in prodigiously high regard. *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is believed to be dated since 1700. It was first published in 1908 in Singapore by the Methodist Publishing House. It was printed fully in both Jawi and Rumi scripts (Md Salleh Yaapar 2008, 92). It was about three decades after Shellabear first produced the Singapore text that other full print versions of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* appeared on the literary scene within the archipelago (Md Salleh Yaapar 2008, 93). *Hikayat Hang Tuah* was listed in UNESCO's Memory of the World Program International Register in 2001.<sup>3</sup>

Hang Tuah has given us many excellent and extraordinary stories to wow about and to be proud of. His devotion to his sultan and his country is the most excellent example that made him special. As a commander and later given the title of admiral, Hang Tuah can be regarded as an impeccable hero. This certainly defines Hang Tuah as a culture hero among the Malays. The image of Hang Tuah has contributed so much to the literature and culture of his people. Many a time, he has proven that he is no mundane man. He had shown his skills in warfare and martial arts. He is feared by his enemies. He has shaped the history of the Malacca sultanate which has a central position in the development of Malay identity.

Hang Tuah is as important as many other culture heroes from all over the world that had contributed to and shaped their culture and people. The proofs are in the *Sulalatus Salatin* and *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Even at one point when scholars and sceptics question the real existence of Hang Tuah, he still remains a hero in the hearts of many more who strongly believe in his existence.

Hang Tuah is not only famous among the Malays of the Peninsula but also among the people of Sumatra, Brunei, Singapore, Java and Bugis (Muhammad Haji Salleh 2012, 123). In fact, he is not only regarded highly by the Malays, but also by the Indians in India. In 1988, for example, an Indian director named Shyam Benegal directed a historical docudrama entitled *Bharat Ek-Khoj* in which Hang Tuah is featured.<sup>4</sup> The docudrama is based on the book *Discovery of India* (1946) by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India. It was released and shown as a docudrama on one of the prestigious channels in India, the Doordarshan Channel. Doordarshan is an autonomous Government of India-founded public service broadcaster.

The docudrama *Bharat Ek-Khoj* consists of 53 episodes that cover a 5,000-year history of India from its commencements to the advent of independence in 1947. Each episode, with a specific title, consists of important historical events related to the title. In the 28th episode of *Bharat Ek-Khoj*, which is mainly on the Vijayanagar kingdom which is called “Bijaya Nagaram” in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, Hang Tuah is highlighted as a brave warrior and an excellent swordsman.

Every detail of Hang Tuah as a great warrior is featured in the docudrama. King Sri Krisnadevaraya, known as Raja Kisna Rayan in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, favours Hang Tuah very much as mentioned in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. One could not imagine how a film director from another cultural group, emanating from a different country, found *Hikayat Hang Tuah* as a promising epic and why he was incentivised to adapt the story of Hang Tuah in the Vijayanagar kingdom based on the text. This shows that Hang Tuah is not only revered by the Malays but also vaunted by Indians in far-away India.

It is within this context that the present researcher takes the rare opportunity to study Hang Tuah in the *Bharat Ek-Khoj* docudrama and review the adaptation from *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. The analysis is done on the adaptation in order to understand Hang Tuah as a Malay culture hero, as well as his whole-heart acceptance as a hero in India. This research aims to broaden the study of Hang Tuah’s adaptations ecumenically. The creative work of adaptation may reflect the posture of the Indians, especially director Benegal, towards the Malay culture hero. It may prove that the Indians really have high regard for this particular Malay culture hero.

### **Problem Statement**

Adapting a Malay literary figure into a Malay film in Malaysia or Nusantara is not really surprising. But, when an Indian director from India took the effort to adapt Hang Tuah into his award-winning historical docudrama *Bharat Ek-Khoj*, it is really an eye-opener. To an ordinary Indian of yesteryear or even today, Hang Tuah was and is a total stranger. Besides, India already has enough culture heroes for the director to highlight in his *Bharat Ek-Khoj* docudrama. Yet, Benegal had the hankering to include Hang Tuah in his docudrama and make him a fascinating member of a royal circle in Indian history. In fact, in *Bharat Ek-Khoj*, Hang Tuah is hoisted high as a great hero who manages to vanquish a local warrior of the Vijayanagar Kingdom. One wonders why Benegal is so keen to make this Malay epic hero appear in his docudrama to be viewed by his fellow countrymen, thus acknowledging the existence of a superior hero from a foreign culture.

All the above indicates that the docudrama adaptation was worth studying. However, not a single study has been made on this Indian adaptation. This research is therefore an effort to fill up the gap. It is not to prove the existence of Hang Tuah, but to study the dramatic adaptation done by an Indian from India, who did not have a second thought to present Hang Tuah as a great warrior to his Indian audience.

This study enabled the researcher to explore the reasons why the director adapts Hang Tuah from the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Why was he so impressed with this Malay warrior? What impressed director Benegal to utilise the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* in working out the Vijayanagar episode? This study will answer all the questions. And most importantly, this study will look closely at the representation of Hang Tuah in the docudrama.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of the study is to analyse what transpires in the adaptation of a Malay literary text to an Indian docudrama, concretely with reference to the figure of Hang Tuah in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and Hang Tuah in *Bharat Ek-Khoj* docudrama.

Specifically, this study makes a close analysis of the representation of Hang Tuah, the Malay culture hero and his acceptance as a warrior in *Bharat Ek-Khoj* directed by Shyam Benegal. The docudrama was released in 1988 on one of the most prestigious channels in India, the Doordarshan Channel. This study is an effort to understand and appreciate the Indian attitude towards a Malay hero and why. This study also analysed closely the similarities and differences between Hang Tuah in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and Hang Tuah in the *Bharat Ek-Khoj* docudrama by director Benegal.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is significant because it will establish the following facts which are not known before. First, there is a Malay literary influence on Indian docudrama/film. This is something great to ponder. *Hikayat Hang Tuah* already had been the subject matter of many foreign scholars who have published books, monographs and journal articles. But to have the influence of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* in a foreign docudrama is something to appreciate and mainly to look forward to. What more in the Indian film industry which is considered to be one of the biggest film industries in the world. To have the influence of a Malay text and a Malay culture hero in a huge production such as *Bharat Ek-Khoj* is really a good start for Malay literature and culture and a promising start to expand the fame of the story of Hang Tuah

worldwide. But did the director make a fair representation of the Malay culture hero? This study will unveil the truth along the way.

The second significance has to do with the fact that in this docudrama Hang Tuah is viewed highly by an Indian emperor, who is prominent in Indian history, to the extent that the former was made a martial art trainer in the royal court.

## Literature Review

There are several studies and theses that are available regarding the relationship between Literature and Film/Movie/Docudrama. Similarly, many studies have been conducted on Hang Tuah. Most of these studies were written in the form of theses, books and essays, in journals as well as magazines. In the 20th and the 21st centuries, we observe that there are different studies concerning the Malay culture hero. Amongst them are those by Winstedt (1969), Kassim Ahmad (1964a; 1964b), de Jong (1965), Iskandar (1970), Parnickel (1976), Singaravelu (1982), Abu Hassan (1994), Sulastin (1983), Braginsky (1990), Muhammad Haji Salleh (1983; 1999; 2002), Nanney (1988), Maier (1999), Md Salleh Yaapar (2008), Siti Hawa (2005), Sohaimi and Rohaya (2012) and Hashim and Rohaidah (2015). Their studies are all based on the famous and daunting, written version of the story, the earliest of which is Leiden's Cod. Or. 1706 and also later versions edited by Shellabear (1908) and finally the most recent by Kassim Ahmad (1997), which is the most accessible and therefore the most referred to. However, so far, no thesis or any other form of writing has ever been attempted on the subject of Hang Tuah in the *Bharat Ek-Khoj* docudrama.

There are some interesting studies on Hang Tuah in Vijayanagar. One is an essay written by Singaravelu in 1982, entitled "The Ambassadorial Mission of Laksamana Hang Tuah from the Kingdom of Malacca to the Kingdom of Vijayanagar in South India". This essay is a literary and historical discussion of Hang Tuah's journey to the Vijayanagar kingdom as reflected in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Singaravelu (1982, 32–33) believes that although there is an anachronism in the tale regarding the mission, there are also elements of historical truth. In a similar tone, Md Salleh Yaapar's book chapter "Another Place, Another Form: Hang Tuah in the Netherlands of the Nineteenth Century" (2008, 89–104) offers insights into forms and motivations of spatiotemporal importation and adaptation of classic texts from a vantage point of comparative literature. Focusing on the text "Hikayat Hang Tuah: Darihal Utusan Melayu Pergi ke Benua Keling" (The Tale of Hang Tuah: On the Malay Mission to India, i.e., Hang Tuah's Travel to Vijayanagar) published in Leiden in 1871, Md Salleh Yaapar shows how the form and focus of the narration shifted when the story of Hang Tuah was removed geographically

and socio-culturally for foreign consumption. According to him, the Dutch were singularly interested in the Indian episode because they wanted to really know the physical prowess, mind and ingenuity of Hang Tuah. In other words, they wanted to understand the Malay culture hero not only as a great warrior but also as a distinguished ambassador.

As may be observed earlier, both Singaravelu's journal article and Md Salleh Yaapar's book chapter focus on Hang Tuah's visit to Vijayanagar. However, both do not touch on Hang Tuah's adaptation in the *Bharat Ek-Khoj* docudrama.

Several studies have been conducted regarding Hang Tuah in adaptations, especially into film and drama/theatre. One obvious study was conducted by Wan Hasmah, who obtained her master's degree by completing a thesis entitled "Daripada Kertas kepada Layar: Transformasi Kisah Hang Tuah daripada *Hikayat Hang Tuah* dan *Sulalat al-Salatin* kepada 'Puteri Gunung Ledang'" (2013), a part of which was later published as an essay in a book entitled *Sastera dalam Budaya dan Media* (2014). This study specifically examines the transformation of the story of Hang Tuah from literary texts to film. It scrutinises the relationship between literary texts and film. Wan Hasmah analyses the addition, removal and renovation made by the director and screenwriter of *Puteri Gunung Ledang*, identifying the extent of loyalty of the film to its text. She finds that in the process of adaptation the director and screenwriter were more interested in their own creativity rather than being loyal to the literary text.

In 2000, Muhammad Farique Azim Shah from Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan (ASWARA) wrote for his bachelor's degree a thesis entitled "Perbezaan Tafsiran Watak di antara Filem *Hang Tuah* dan *Hang Jebat*". This study discusses the adaptation that took place in the classical Malay film *Hang Tuah* (1956) and *Hang Jebat* (1961). However, there are aspects that are found to differ from the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* literary text. These differences were discussed briefly in the studies. Next is an article by Nancy K. Nanney entitled "Evolution of a Hero: The Hang Tuah/Hang Jebat tale in Malay Drama" (1988). It discusses the evolution of both characters of Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat in Malay drama. An earlier journal article is "Some Historical Sources Used by the Author of *Hikayat Hang Tuah*" (1970), written by T. Iskandar. This was followed by "Tales of Hang Tuah: In Search of Wisdom and Good Behaviour" by H.M. Maier in 1999.

Other than those publications, there are two writings on the transformations of Hang Tuah into the film by Siti Hawa Salleh. She criticises the film *Puteri Gunung Ledang* and disagrees with how Hang Tuah is portrayed in it. This criticism is an academic essay published in *Dewan Sastera*, entitled "Daripada Karya kepada



Pentas dan Sinematografi: Hanya Persoalan Interpretasi Semula” (2005, 35). She questions how Hang Tuah is paraphrased in the form of drama, performances and films. The second essay entitled “Muzikal PGL: Legenda yang Diselewengkan” (2006, 21–25) discusses how the legendary hero perverted from a national epic hero into a love failure and indirectly disloyal to the sultan, which totally differs from Hang Tuah known from the literary texts. This, additionally, leads to the failure of the film director, screenwriter and film producer in presenting what is in the text.

This study is followed by another similar article written by Sohaimi Abdul Aziz and Rohaya Md Ali. It is another topic close to the present research, entitled “Adaptations of Hang Tuah in Children Literature” (2012). This article is about adaptations of stories about Hang Tuah for children. It is analysed as mainly partial adaptations and the stories chosen for adaptation are especially those containing strong elements of fantasy. The next close studies done are the books by Rohaidah Kamaruddin and Hashim Musa entitled *Hang Tuah: Catatan Okinawa* (2015) and *Hang Tuah: Catatan Vijaya Nagara* (2017) which were written together with Shamshull Kamar. The books are mainly about tracking Hang Tuah’s evidence historically in Okinawa, Japan and in Vijayanagar, India. The book has nothing to do with adaptations of Hang Tuah.

From this review, it is clear that there are no studies or research done to appraise Hang Tuah in foreign film/movie/docudrama adaptations such as *Bharat Ek-Khoj* by director Shyam Benegal of India. Within this context, it is obvious that the current study is a pioneer in the subject. Properly conducted, it will shed light on why a Malay literary text is appropriated by an Indian film/docudrama director and why a Malay culture hero is accepted by the Indian community in India.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

This study critically studied the transformation of the Malay culture hero Hang Tuah in the literary text entitled *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (1997) to Hang Tuah in the docudrama entitled *Bharat Ek-Khoj* (1988). This transformation is examined in the context of literature-to-film adaptation. For this purpose, the adaptation theory by Brian McFarlane (1996) was used by the researcher. Meanwhile, the concept of culture hero by Jerome Long, as stipulated in *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (2005), is discussed in the following section.



## Culture hero

Hang Tuah is the one in a million and a well-received hero in the Malay Archipelago for more than 500 years. He is a figure that represents the Malays themselves. He will always remain a magnetic figure and it is definitely hard not to admire him as a Malay culture hero. His heroic spirit comes out through his personal integrity and intellect. The great strength of Hang Tuah's character is his morality, always trying to do the right thing for everyone around him. Over the centuries he has helped Malays in the Malay Archipelago to define their social and moral ideals and given them pride in their national identity. As Robson-McKillop (1942, 1) says, "The *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, the *Epic of Hang Tuah* is the great narrative of the Malay Archipelago and has always inspired strong passions in its readers and audiences. The protagonist, Hang Tuah, is the nonpareil of culture heroes".

Throughout the world, many of the earliest records contain the stories of heroes, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Mahabharata* and the *Kokiji*. These records refer to a pre-literate time, illustrating the fact that culture heroes have been with us since. The word "hero" itself comes from Greek and generally refers to those who possess unusual, superhuman abilities. The heroes were often in contact with the gods and fought against evil. However, the main purpose of the culture hero is not only to establish the community's traditions and change the world through invention or discovery but also to embody his culture its ideals and values.

The culture hero is a mythical being found in the religious traditions of many archaic societies... The culture hero establishes institutions for humans, brings them cultural goods and instruct them in the art of civilisation. Thus, the hero introduces culture to human being. (Long 2005, 2090)

Culture heroes are the ones who show how to implement the principles valued by a particular culture. Since he is a symbol of a culture's valued virtues, a culture hero's deeds could be greatly adorned and his imperfections overlooked. The genuine events of a hero's life were much less consequential than the edifications that the narrative conveyed. All the culture heroes described by texts appeared to be round characters, possessing different, sometimes even antithesis qualities (Ryabchikova 2014, 98).

Based on the discussion, this study utilised the culture hero concept to view Hang Tuah in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* as well as in *Bharat Ek-Khoj*.

## Discussion

The finding shows that Hang Tuah is regarded as a great warrior in the docudrama. He is even made a martial art trainer in the royal court. However, he is not properly represented as a Malay culture hero. The study is significant because it establishes the following facts. First, that is a Malay literary influence on Indian docudrama/film. The second significance has to do with the fact that Hang Tuah is viewed highly by an Indian emperor, who is prominent in Indian history, to the extent that the former was made a martial art trainer in the royal court.

There are major differences between the Malay literary text and the Indian docudrama, although both stayed true to the legend of Hang Tuah's loyalty, bravery and wisdom. The docudrama is very informative and entertaining. The developments of the characters are impressive. But, again here the researcher would like to stress that the director only focused on important historical events of the Vijayanagar kingdom, thus leading to the loss of notable qualities of Hang Tuah as a Malay culture hero. Also disappointing is the duration allocated to Hang Tuah shown in the 28th episode of the docudrama. Hang Tuah just appears for about 15 minutes to 20 minutes in the lengthy episode. The researcher feels that more time should have been given to Hang Tuah. But again, one should not forget that this docudrama is all about Indian history from the beginning till now.

This study analysed Episode 28 of *Bharat Ek-Khoj* according to the adaptation theory by McFarlane (1996) regarding the issue of being truthful (fidelity). A question is asked if the director followed *Hikayat Hang Tuah* texts closely on making the Episode 28 of *Bharat Ek-Khoj*? The answer is no, the director is not being truthful to the text. *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is very detailed about Hang Tuah's travel from Malacca to the Vijayanagar kingdom. In the docudrama, there was no detail regarding Hang Tuah's travel. Hang Tuah is simply shown as a swordsman practising sword fighting in King Krisnadevarayan's court. The king appoints him to teach the royal guards his sword skills. But, in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* text, Hang Tuah is shown as a respected traveller, a great fighter as well as a diplomat from Malacca who later the King Kisna Rayan appoints to lead an Indian mission to China. More than that, Hang Tuah is also a wise person with a speech full of humility and wisdom. As stated, Hang Tuah is given many faces in the Malay text, but in the Indian docudrama, he is just shown as a guest from Malaya, with excellent sword skills. As discussed in the earlier section, the idea of Hang Tuah fighting a warrior is there, but the person, the reason and the circumstance is changed according to the docudrama requirements. Hang Tuah is featured without a shirt. In the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, Hang Tuah kills the Indian warrior, but in the docudrama, the warrior kills himself out of humiliation. Maybe, the director

intended to preserve the pride of the Indian warrior in this matter. Of course, it will be a disgrace to have his Indian culture warrior killed by a hero from a different culture. However, the main idea of Hang Tuah defeating an Indian warrior is already there.

More importantly, the image of Hang Tuah as a culture hero is amiss in the docudrama. Hang Tuah is misrepresented as a Malay culture hero while in this docudrama, he is just a great fighter/warrior. Again here, it is important to remember that in creating Episode 28 of *Bharat Ek-Khoj*, the main objective of the scriptwriters and the director was to tell stories about King Krisnadevaraya and his empire. While within this context, the Hang Tuah event is just a small part of things that happened in the king's court, this is still not acceptable.

When it comes to transfer and adaptation proper, the effects derived from the verbal (*Hikayat Hang Tuah*) to the visual (*Bharat Ek-Khoj*) transformation was analysed. This category falls under the "Identification of mythic/or psychological patterns" according to McFarlane (1996). The analysis aids the research to recognise to what extent Hang Tuah is preserved as a Malay culture hero in the *Bharat Ek-Khoj* docudrama. One of the interesting aspects discussed was the characterisation of Hang Tuah in this docudrama. For this purpose, one should know whether Benegal really understood "Hang Tuah" before he adapted him into his *Bharat Ek-Khoj*? There is a possibility that he did not. Hang Tuah is not shown as a hero from a specific culture in the docudrama. First, he is wrongly presented as a guest from Malaya, not from the great Malacca sultanate and he is portrayed as a fine swordsman in the docudrama. After further observation, the only part that Hang Tuah represents his culture is when he explains to King Krisnadevaraya how a warrior is chosen by his king and how much the warriors will be respected by his people. Only in this dialogue, it is shown that the director was keen to introduce a different society and culture to his Indian audience. Just this one alone; so, the researcher feels that it is not enough to reflect Malay culture in general. However, what seems to be relevant is in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, Benegal projects Hang Tuah as a warrior who could not be defeated even by the finest warrior from the South Indian land. But again, in one particular scene, Hang Tuah's arrogant statement raised some doubts about the director's understanding of the character of this Malay culture hero.

Then again, even though generally the nature of Hang Tuah changed dramatically in the docudrama, his loyalty towards his superiors and his courage and martial art skills are preserved as it is in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. These could be clearly witnessed when he obeys King Krisnadevaraya when he is asked to become the royal trainer of his palace guards. Not only that, but he also fights Prince Veerabhatra when the

king ordered him to. Here, Hang Tuah straight away obeys without any hesitations. Even in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, Hang Tuah is loyal to Raja Kisna Rayan. That is why he accepts the king's appointment and leads the Indian mission to China.

The next important point is the way Hang Tuah stands firm in his opinion about sword fighting. This clearly shows that this is the same Hang Tuah who always defends the importance of self-protection and martial arts skills. In fact, there is also a similarity here with Hang Tuah in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. In the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, while in India, Hang Tuah was also involved in sword fighting. At the stage of adaptations and the codes, Hang Tuah, as re-invented by Benegal and his team, has been analysed in terms of cultural codes. This is in order to know if he resembles the real Hang Tuah, a warrior from Malacca. Of all the codes, cultural codes involving all the information which has to do with how people live, lived at a particular time and place, are discussed. In this case, elements such as his appearance, his clothes, his style, his fluency in speech and his martial art efficiency were analysed. In this docudrama, one can observe the exchange between nations and cultures. But to fully understand and experience the culture of a community, one will have to live in the environment of that community. Only then can the process of assimilation and adaptation take place. In adapting Hang Tuah in the docudrama, a lot of focus was given to the Indian culture and not the Malay culture. Speaking of culture, the researcher refers to the lifestyle – how the society here lives, their protocols, the way they dress, and so much more. The research shows that the director failed in doing an in-depth observation of the dress code and the protocols which define the Malay culture. Such things impacted the pre-production work of costume and set design. Looking back upon the costume of Hang Tuah, the docudrama actually portrays and presents much about Indian culture, but not so much about a Malay culture hero. The similarity that should be appreciated is that in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, Hang Tuah is loyal to his kings and very fluent in the Vijayanagar language. In *Bharat Ek-Khoj*, these features are also present.

As explained earlier, Benegal was so keen to make this Malay epic hero appear in his docudrama just to prove the fact that the Vijayanagar kingdom has a diplomatic relationship with other countries and one of them was Malaya (in actuality, Malacca). In fact, he believed that King Krisnadevarayan of Vijayanagar did hire Hang Tuah to serve as a martial art trainer in his royal court. Secondly, he wanted to introduce a great warrior from Malaya to be viewed by his fellow countrymen, thus acknowledging the existence of a superior hero from a foreign culture. Benegal is always fascinated with heroes. As such, the value that Hang Tuah possessed as a hero attracted him to introduce the Malay warrior in his award-winning historical docudrama.

Conclusively, this study reveals the important fact that there is a Malay literary influence on Indian docudrama/film. To have the influence of a Malay text and a Malay culture hero in a huge production such as *Bharat Ek-Khoj* is an honour to Malay literature and culture. More than that, Hang Tuah is viewed highly by an Indian emperor, who is prominent in Indian history, to the extent that the former was made a martial art trainer in the royal court. This is another important finding of this research on the adaptation of Hang Tuah in the Indian docudrama. Now, one should understand that the docudrama is a promising start to expand the fame of the story of Hang Tuah worldwide. This might not be the end of Hang Tuah adaptations globally; one day maybe another director from Europe or America will show interest in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and Hang Tuah.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis, it is fair to conclude that “Bab Utusan Melayu ke Benua Keling” in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* focuses on Hang Tuah, the Malay culture hero. On the contrary, Episode 28 of *Bharat Ek-Khoj* focuses on King Krisnadevaraya and his empire, Vijayanagar. The scene featuring Hang Tuah is a minor part of the episode. Hang Tuah is not the central figure in that episode of the docudrama; he is there only as a helper to the king. Thus, only one aspect of Hang Tuah is highlighted in the docudrama, that he is a great fighter or warrior who is appointed as chief instructor of the royal guards. This is an honour to the Malay hero. His loyalty to the king is clearly seen. So is his language mannerism. However, in terms of dress code, Hang Tuah in the Indian docudrama is without a shirt. This is very much unlike the Hang Tuah that Malay society is familiar with. As explained earlier, Hang Tuah is always well-presented wherever he goes. On the contrary, in *Bharat Ek-Khoj*, Hang Tuah as an ambassador from Malacca to India and India to China is completely missing. So is his wisdom, magical abilities and problem-solving skills. Overall, the analysis shows that the director was not being 100% truthful to the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* text. However, this is very much in line with the objective of the docudrama, which is to focus on King Krisnadevaraya and his empire, Vijayanagar.

Production values of the Episode 28 of *Bharat Ek-Khoj* are excellent in general. The docudrama overall has a glossy, polished sheen. The period milieu and mise-en-scène are gorgeous and the palace and traditional speech appear authentic which imply a nice background research there. The music is excellent with a nice mix of Indian strings. The acting is uniformly above par across the board, especially Om Puri as King Krisnadevaraya and Shuny Bee as the legendary warrior, Hang Tuah. Indian actors are some of the finest in the region and somehow the actor carries a screen presence that conveys the bravery of this most famous of *perwira*

*Melayu* (Malay warrior). It is also nice to see other actors such as the proud Prince Veerabhadra, Prime Minister Appaji and the other palace warriors who are seen with Hang Tuah.

The earlier sequence of Hang Tuah taking a posse of a fine swordsman is very well done. The action sequence between Prince Veerabhadra and Hang Tuah could have gone towards additional scenes between the two characters interlocking could have had much more impact. Many issues are unfocused, yet Hang Tuah is never failed to be portrayed as a great warrior. Being a prestige drama, the direction is serious and high-minded.

In the interview carried out through email between the researcher and director Benegal,<sup>5</sup> the researcher concluded that Benegal is attracted to Hang Tuah's character as a great swordsman. As Benegal puts it:

The most important Hindu kingdom of peninsular India and also the last to hold sway was the Vijay Nagar Kingdom. Its greatest and most notable ruler was Krishnadeva Raya. During the time of his rule, the Vijayanagar Kingdom had diplomatic contacts with countries of South East and East Asia which included present-day Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and present-day Vietnam. There was considerable movement of people and commerce between all these countries and the Vijayanagar Kingdom. Hang Tuah was employed by Krishnadeva Raya for a time...

Hang Tuah was known far and wide as the best swordsman of his time. It was his fame that attracted Krishnadeva Raya's interest in him.

(Based on the e-mail communication with the authors.)<sup>6</sup>

From the interview, it directly shows that Benegal is clearly aware of Hang Tuah and his contributions as a Malay culture hero towards his society in history. Benegal had done some research before he started his *Bharat Ek-Khoj* project. He had concentrated on the Vijayanagar episode as he considered the Vijayanagar kingdom as one of the most important Hindu kingdoms of peninsular India and also the last to hold sway was the Vijayanagar kingdom with its greatest and most notable ruler King Krishnadevaraya. In one of the interviews, Benegal mentioned that Hang Tuah was indeed an excellent swordsman according to the studies. In this interview, it is clearly stated that Benegal is attracted to Hang Tuah's ability as a great swordsman. He is well known not only in Malacca but again he is well known in the foreign land too. And since Benegal had the reference of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and he had few good researchers to elaborate on the Vijayanagar

kingdom, he is all set to portray the Malay culture hero as it is. Following is the statement by Benegal in the interview:<sup>6</sup>

All our references to Hang Tuah come from *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. The Vijayanagar Empire of Southern India had connections with the Hindu/Buddhist kingdoms of Majapahit in Java.

I am sure there are many different versions of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* available in your National Library.

(Based on the e-mail communication with the authors.)<sup>7</sup>

Our researcher got the reference from an early version of *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. This was from a translation of the book from the late 15th and early 16th century. The translation is available in the Mumbai University. There is also another translation of the classic done by UNESCO.

(Based on the e-mail communication with the authors.)<sup>8</sup>

Benegal who had referred to the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* maybe had a point to prove that Hang Tuah possibly fits into the chapters of the Vijayanagar kingdom. Maybe he felt it was his responsibility to show a warrior from a different country in his Vijayanagar episode as the Vijayanagar Kingdom is directly connected to the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Vijayanagar kingdom in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is a vast kingdom and the structure and the wealth were even admired by Hang Tuah. Maybe he wanted to look for evidence of the Vijayanagar kingdom in other manuscripts like the scholars were looking for Hang Tuah in other manuscripts too. Maybe it was a random pick and Hang Tuah is destined to be a part of Benegal's docudrama. The drama is an eye-opener for Malaysian scholars who are looking for evidence of Hang Tuah in foreign texts or movies. The effect of "Bharat Ek-Khoj" on the Malaysian hero Hang Tuah had become so immense that everyone started to believe the Vijayanagar chapter in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. If what was said is true and if it is really a historical fact that Hang Tuah had been in India as per mentioned in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, Hang Tuah must have left some kind of evidence behind for the scholars to study. The study remained to be explored by the scholars who are more interested in tracking down Hang Tuah historically. Even when Hang Tuah occupies a very small place in the *Bharat Ek-Khoj* docudrama, Malaysian's should feel honoured to have their hero in the *Bharat Ek-Khoj* drama. The docudrama is done by Benegal in an effort to bring alive the 5000 years old history back to life. The character of Hang Tuah is thoroughly analysed and the description is taken seriously the actor chosen for the character explains the effort taken by director Benegal. And his effort had introduced Hang Tuah to his Indian audience



as well as the international audience because *Bharat Ek-Khoj* is not only viewed in India but also viewed by international audiences. The fact that Hang Tuah is now known not only in Malaysia and Indonesia but with the effort of Benegal, he is now known worldwide as a great “Malay culture hero” who once upon a time had made his nation proud.

### Acknowledgements

This paper is part of the chapter from the author’s dissertation entitled “From *Hikayat Hang Tuah* to *Bharat Ek-Khoj*: A Malay Culture Hero in an Indian Docudrama” from Literature Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia (2018).

### Notes

1. A Malay work of literature that tells the tale of legendary Malay warrior, Hang Tuah, and his four warrior friends—Hang Jebat, Hang Kasturi, Hang Lekir and Hang Lekiu—who lived during the height of sultanate of Malacca in the 15th century.
2. Also known as *Malay Annals*, it is a literary work that gives a romanticised history of the origin, evolution and demise of the great Malay maritime empire, the Malacca sultanate. The work which was composed sometime between 15th and 16th centuries is considered one of the finest literary and historical works in the Malay language. There are various editions by various writers: Abdullah Munsi (1831, in Jawi), Dulaurier (1849–1856), Shellabear (1986), Winstedt, (1938), Situmorang and Teeuw (1952) refer to the edition by Abdullah Munsi, Dato’ Madjoindo (1959, in Jawi) and A. Samad Ahmad (1979).
3. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/access-by-region-and-country/my/>
4. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEaHFxor510>
5. Authors have interviewed the director, Shyam Benegal, through e-mails dated between January, February and July 2017.
6. This is quoted from an e-mail from Benegal dated 20th July 2017.
7. This is quoted from an e-mail from Benegal dated 24th January 2017.
8. This is quoted from an e-mail from Benegal dated 23rd January 2017.

### References

- A. Samad Ahmad, ed. 1986. *Sejarah Melayu (Sulalatus Salatin)*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Abu Hassan Sham. 1994. *Perbandingan Sejarah Melayu dengan Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Selangor, Malaysia: Masa Enterprise.
- Benegal, S., dir. 1988. *Bharat Ek-Khoj*, Episode 28. Directed and produced for Doordardhan Channel, India.

- Bharti, K. 2015. Analyzing the narrative structure to depict Indian history in television series “Bharat Ek-Khoj”. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 20(11): 29–34.
- Braginsky, V. 1990. Hikayat Hang Tuah: Malay epic and Muslim mirror; Some considerations on its date, meaning and structure. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 146(4): 399–412.
- De Jong, P.E.J. 1965. The rise and decline of a national hero. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 38(2): 140–155.
- Errington, S. 1975. *Study of genre: Meaning and form in Malay Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Farish A. Noor. 2001. Deconstructing our national hero. In *What your teacher didn't tell you*. The Annexe Lectures, Vol. 1. Selangor, Malaysia: Matahari Books.
- Hashim Musa and Rohaidah Kamaruddin. 2015. *Hang Tuah: Catatan Okinawa*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Hashim Musa, Rohaidah Kamaruddin and Shamshull Kamar Ahmad. 2017. *Hang Tuah: Catatan Vijaya Nagara*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Iskandar, T. 1970. Some historical sources used by the author of Hikayat Hang Tuah. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 43(1): 35–47.
- Kamaruddin M. Said. 1992. The signifier and heroes in the Hikayat Hang Tuah: A reinterpretation. *Malay Literature* 5(2): 156–179.
- Kassim Ahmad, ed. 1997. *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan dan Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1964a. *Characterization in “Hikayat Hang Tuah”*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1964b. *Perwatakan dalam Hikayat Hang Tuah: (Penyelidekan umum tentang chara penggambaran watak serta uraian dan penafsiran watak Hang Tuah dan Hang Jebat)*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pelajaran.
- Long, J.H. 2005. Culture heroes. In *Encyclopaedia of religion*, ed. L. Jones. 2nd Ed. Macmillan Reference. Detroit: Thomas Gale Press.
- Maier, H.M. 1999. Tales of Hang Tuah: In search of wisdom and good behavior. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 155(3): 342–361.
- McFarlane, B. 1996. *Novel to film: An introduction to the theory of adaptation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Md Salleh Yaapar. 2008. Another place, another form: Hang Tuah in the Netherland of the Nineteenth Century. In *Exploring space: Trends in literature, linguistics and translation*, eds. Shakila Manan and L. Sinha, 89–104. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Miksic, J. 2012. Dunia Melayu dan Singapura: Dari sudut arkeologi. Paper presented at a conference organised by Taman Warisan Melayu. National Museum Singapore, 30 April. Retrieved from <http://cyberita.asia1.sg/msingapura> (accessed 1 May 2017)
- Muhammad Haji Salleh. 2012. Hang Tuah in the sea of oral Malay narratives. *Malay Literature* 25(2): 121–158.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. Hang Tuah dalam budaya alam Melayu. In *Warisan manuskrip Melayu*, 95–107. Kuala Lumpur: Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. Mendialog wira: Hujah di sebalik kata. In *Menyeberang sejarah*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. Romping around in epical space: Making room for Hang Tuah. Paper presented at the VTCZOA Seminar. Leiden University.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. Central values of the Malay hero: Hang Tuah. In *Yang empunya cerita: The mind of the Malay author*, 74–97. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. Central values of Hang Tuah, the Malay hero. *Tenggara* 17/18: 74–97.
- Nanney, N.K. 1988. Evolution of a hero: The Hang Tuah/Hang Jebat tale in Malay drama. *Asian Theatre Journal* 5(2): 164–174.
- Nehru, J. 1946. *The discovery of India*. New York: The John Day Company.
- Parnickel, R.B. 1976. An epic hero and an “epic traitor” in the Hikayat Hang Tuah. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 132: 403–417.
- Rahmah Bujang. 2012. The construction of the Malay hero as conceived in Hikayat Hang Tuah. *Malay Literature* 25(2): 177–197.
- Revel, N. 2013. *Songs of memory in islands of Southeast Asia*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Robson-McKillop, R., ed. 1942. *The epic of Hang Tuah*. Translated by Muhammad Haji Salleh. Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan Negara Malaysia.
- Ryabchikova, E. 2014. A culture hero in mythology and folklore of Europe and Asia. In *Young Scientist USA: Humanities*, 98. Auburn, WA: Lulu Press.
- Shellabear, W.G., ed. 1908. *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Singapore: Malaya Publishing House.
- Singaravelu, S. 1982. The ambassadorial mission of Laksamana Hang Tuah from the kingdom of Malacca to the kingdom of Vijayanagaram in South India, India. *Tamil Studies* 2(1): 24–33.
- Siti Hawa Salleh. 2006. Muzikal PGL: Legenda yang diselewengkan? *Dewan Sastera* July: 21–25.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005. Daripada karya kepada pentas dan sinematografi: Hanya persoalan interpretasi semula. *Dewan Sastera* January: 33–39.
- Sohaimi Abdul Aziz and Rohaya Md Ali. 2012. Adaptations of Hang Tuah in children literature. *Malay Literature* 25(2): 261–285.
- Sohaimi Abdul Aziz. 2011. Laskar Pelangi: Satu penelitian adaptasi novel ke filem. *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* 18(1): 35–32.
- Sulastin, S. 1983. *Hikayat Hang Tuah: Analisa struktur dan fungsi*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Teeuw, A. 1965. Tentang penghargaan dan pentafsiran Hikayat Hang Tuah. *Dewan Bahasa* 8(8): 339–354.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. *Membaca dan menilai sastera*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Wan Hasmah Wan Teh. 2013. Dari kertas ke layar: Transformasi kisah Hang Tuah dari Hikayat Hang Tuah dan Sulalat al-Salatin ke “Puteri Gunung Ledang”. In *Sastera dalam budaya dan media*, eds. Halimah Mohamed Ali and Mohamad Luthfi, 266–267. Pulau Pinang, Malaysia: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Winstedt, R.O. 1969. *A historical of classical Malay literature*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1956. *The Malays: A cultural history*, 4th Ed. London: Routledge & Kegan.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1938. *The Malay annals or Sejarah Melayu*. Singapore: Printers Limited.